



Index

To use this index: Click on the name of the article you'd like to read to take you directly to that page. You may also open the Bookmark pane on the left and link to the page from the Bookmarks listed.

To print one article, go to that article and then select File/Print from the top menu bar and choose "Current Page" in the Print dialogue box.

To print other articles, go to the Print dialog box and select which page(s) you want to print.

If you select Print All, your printer will print all the articles in this document along with this index page.

Me and My Child

- Q:** I'm a brand new dad and I'm not so sure how to even hold my precious baby girl. (see "Dad's Pick-Up Game")
- Q:** I don't want my child left behind when she reaches school, but she's not quite three years old yet. Should I be teaching her "ABCs" already? What should I do? (see "Preparing a Child for Kindergarten")
- Q:** My three-year-old already loves junk food. How do I break his habit? (see "Food Rules")
- Q:** Sometimes it seems the only way to get my four-year old to stop bad behavior is the threat of a good spanking. This makes me feel bad, are there other things I can do instead? (see "Spare the Rod. Period.")
- Q:** It seems my child's got a bad case of "I-don't-want-to-go-itis." She just throws a fit every time we have to go anywhere or do anything. (see "Prepare for Transitions")
- Q:** I take my three-year old grocery shopping and she just wants to get out of the cart and pull items off the shelves. What can I do? (see "Plan Ahead to Avoid the Gimmies")
- Q:** The holidays are coming up. What gifts would you suggest that have some educational value? (see "Holiday Gifts")
- Q:** I want my child to be a good reader, so I am going to start reading to him, but when? He's less than a year old, and he'd just as soon chew on the book as look at it. (see "Reading is a Three Way Street")
- Q:** My six-month old baby has started inching her way around the floor, so I know that she'll be crawling around the room soon. How should I be prepared? (see "Here She Comes")

Child Care Outside the Home

- Q:** I just found out I am pregnant. This is my first child, and I will need child care for my baby. What are the different child care options available to me? (see "Looking for Infant Child Care")
- Q:** Why do young children come home from child care with paint, mud, or food all over their clothes? Why can't they just stay clean? (see "It's Not 'Making a Mess'")
- Q:** It seems my child spends most of her time in child care at play – while I work all day. How can I tell if my child is really being prepared for school? (see "My Child Plays All Day")
- Q:** The director of the child care center where my three-year old son gets care says his behavior is so aggressive and disruptive that she may not be able to keep him there. What can I do? (see "Expulsion")
- Q:** I really worry about the flu and every other kind of contagious disease that might appear at the child care center. What can I do? (see "Flu Prevention")
- Q:** What do I do when my kid is sick and they won't accept him at child care? I can't afford to miss too many work days. (see "Sick Child Planning")



Dad's "pick up" game

By Mark Sullivan, Executive Director, Michigan4C Association.

Q: Give me a power tool or a ball of any shape or size and I'm pretty comfortable, but now that I'm a brand new dad, I'm not so sure how to even hold my precious baby girl. Please don't tell my wife I've asked about this, I am so embarrassed.

A: First of all it's great you recognize that your new child is not like the rest of your toys and tools. Give her time, though. The more you get to know her the more fun she is likely to be, and one day she might even help you build that new deck out back. So let's get off to a good start with a warm-up drill.

Say she's rested but alert, fed and her diaper is clean. That lowers everyone's anxiety level a lot. Begin by just looking at her. Really look at her from close up. See how she is looking at you! Look at yourself now and the silly faces and noises you started making – probably without even thinking about it. This is not embarrassing. This is fun. This is good! Don't stop!

Now pick her up with both your hands – one supporting her back, and the other supporting her head – and keep looking at her. Talk to her gently, face to face. If she starts to cry or squirm, don't give her away. That sends the wrong signals to everyone. Just hang tough. Hold her close to you and rock her gently until you feel comfortable. She'll pick up on that and will likely calm down, too.

Practice this every moment you can. You can hold her on your knee or cradle her in your arm, but spend as much time as you can with her facing you and you looking and talking to her – even if it's nonsense, or just thinking out loud about something else.

There will be pre-teen years when it will be a chore for her to look right at you, but right now, you are THE MAN. So take every advantage. The research is pretty much on your side; the more you hold your child, look at her and talk gently to her, the better her chances for normal emotional, social and intellectual development.

If this were football the coach might put it in terms of trust, teamwork, and practice. When you hold your children safely, they learn to trust and they have less anxiety. Newborns aren't ready to "learn to cope by themselves." They need someone they can trust to protect them just like the quarterback needs and trusts his interior linemen.

People live around other people – we're social beings. And that requires teamwork, even if the team is only you and your child, and it seems like you are doing most of the work.

Practice means everything when it's game time. When you talk to her you are showing her the highlight reels from your lifetime of learned language. It won't be long before she can't resist imitating it. That part can be very helpful for her speech and intellectual development. It also can be very amusing for you. So go on. Get in the game!

Look for more child care tips at www.MI4C.org. Email your ZERO TO FIVE questions to Zerotofive@mi4c.org.



Preparing a child for Kindergarten is – Elementary!

By Mark Sullivan, Executive Director, Michigan 4C Association

Q: I don't want my child left behind when she reaches school, but she's not quite three years old yet. Should I be teaching her "ABCs" already? What should I do?

A: Try this: turn off the television and the radio. Hang up the phone, and give your child a big hug. Then do something with her, and talk about it while you work or play together.

You could read a book with her, fix a healthy snack, shop for groceries, pretend you are in a parade or take a walk along the street looking for ...who knows what! Repeat this every day – at least twice on those days when you aren't working outside the home.

While you are doing these things, model the kind of good social behavior you would expect if you were spending time with a peer – talking calmly and allowing her to express her thoughts, sharing, showing self-control and encouraging positive behavior with positive feedback. You will have a great time and your child will be preparing for school in every moment.

Why does this work? Children are born learners, so what you are doing is giving your child a chance to exercise the curiosity she was born with by providing lots of different concrete experiences that are shared with others. The hugs and physical closeness are also important. Learning improves when children feel emotionally safe – that is, they feel comfortable with the others they are with, and don't feel at great risk of embarrassment when they try something new.

Teachers will tell you it's great to have kids in Kindergarten who know their ABCs, but what's even more important to your child's success is showing up at school curious and willing to share her knowledge. You are also helping her learn to interact successfully with others and manage basic personal tasks – even geniuses ought to know how to do that!

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Food Rules

By Mark Sullivan, Executive Director, Michigan 4C Association.

Q: My three-year-old already loves junk food. How do I break his habit?

A: Prepare to tighten your belt, because you may lose some weight while you are changing your child's eating habits. Chances are he developed his taste for a number of reasons:

- Junk food is handy, and it has become an easy solution for snacks and meals.
- He's worn you out by refusing to eat healthier choices.
- You have been rewarding good behavior with food "treats."
- He's been watching what you eat.

Most of us fall into these traps, so don't beat yourself up about them, just start avoiding them. Here are a few principles that apply:

You decide what's available to eat. Nutrition is important, so make it a priority. Give yourself time to purchase and prepare fresh fruits, vegetables and non-sugary dairy products for meals and "grab and go" snacks. If you don't buy the other stuff, you won't be tempted by it. You also decide when and where he eats, and planning can make a big difference. If you and he both know there will be a timely snack break it may avoid a "hunger tantrum."

Persist, but nicely. It may take some children ten tries before they really accept a new food. Expect a few refusals, one or two mouthfuls rejected, and maybe a painful face during swallowing or two. Accept those gracefully, with a mention that, "maybe next time you'll like it better." And don't allow later substitutions with poor snacks. This part won't be easy.

Hugs are fat free. So are encouraging words. They make great rewards for children who are patient while you are doing chores or running errands. Talking with your child about what you're doing or playing observation games, such as "I Spy" can help your child participate in your errands. That may help you avoid making deals that go, "if you do this for me, I'll buy a treat for you."

Change your own eating habits. This may be the best part for you. As you buy fewer sugary, salty, fatty snack foods, you will be eating less of them, too. As you enjoy a healthier diet you will be modeling good behavior for you child, and helping yourself. Won't that be nice!

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Spare the rod. Period.

By Mark Sullivan, Executive Director, Michigan4C Association.

Q: I am shocked by the way some parents treat their children, but sometimes it seems the only way to get my four-year old to stop bad behavior is the threat of a good spanking. This makes me feel bad; are there other things I can do instead?

A: A four-year old learns two things from a spanking: First, he learns that whatever he did, he got your attention. Second, he learns from your example that he ought to hit people when they do something he doesn't like. These are not exactly the lessons you were hoping for, I'll bet. Here are four "Rs" to follow that might get you out of your dilemma.

Read the child's cues. Many confrontations can be avoided if you pay close attention to your child's behavior and see the signs he is already agitated, tired, or uncomfortable for some reason. What may seem like random misbehavior probably has causes you can address, if not solve altogether.

Redirect the behavior. As soon as you see trouble coming, offer an alternative. Even better, offer a choice. A four-year old can likely understand and accept a simple explanation, such as, "I'm afraid I can't let you do that, because Billy is still taking his turn. You can work with the blocks, or help me with a snack instead. Which will it be?"

Remove the child from the situation, or the toy or object from the child. Just move on to something else or put away the object. Later, when the situation calms down, you may be able to demonstrate how to play with the toy or do the task appropriately. If you can keep the child right at your side for a time while he starts something else – all the better.

Reflect his feelings back to him. Show him you acknowledge and understand the anger or frustration that may have accompanied an incident. It's good if you can prompt him to express his feelings verbally, but it doesn't have to become an issue if he doesn't. When you acknowledge his frustration, you are not waiving the consequences of what he's done, just recognizing what's behind it. Complete the communication by stating what's wrong with the behavior, and an alternative, such as, "I know it's frustrating when the markers are all dry, but when you throw them on the floor like that, it's just a mess we have to pick up. Let's do that now, and then find something else you can work with, like these crayons."

If you do have to give him a "time out" to help both of you calm down, you can usually give him the choice to return to his activities, "only when you are ready to work within the rules." When possible, put the "time out" spot right near you – your presence is likely to have a calming effect.

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Prepare for transitions

By Mark Sullivan, Executive Director, Michigan4C Association.

Q: It seems my child's got a bad case of "I-don't-want-to-go-itis." She just throws a fit every time we have to go anywhere or do anything. I have to bribe her with treats to get her out the door so I can run some errands.

A: Well, you are right about wanting to break the "treat" cycle. That will only get worse in time. The alternative is to prepare for transitions. We all like to decide for ourselves when we are done with one thing and have to start another. If she's absorbed in a puzzle or a picture book she just may not be ready to stop. Give her a heads up, and enough time to find a stopping point on her own.

Begin with a very specific "alert" that you are going out shortly and she should finish whatever she is doing to start preparing herself. If the television set is on, turn it off. Don't try to compete with a cartoon for her attention. If you choose the programs she watches carefully, you can plan trips so they don't interrupt broadcasts you want her to finish watching. That keeps turning off the TV from becoming an issue in itself.

Your child may not have as keen a sense of time as you do, so providing a "five-minute" or "two-minute" warning won't be as useful as describing time in terms of a specific action, as in, "We can finish your drawing when we return, so stop when you're done with the blue marker and put them all away. Then put on your coat and we will go."

As soon as she begins to prepare herself, you might keep the focus on the transition by describing how you are getting ready, and what role she'll be playing in the trip. If they can anticipate their involvement, children are more likely to embrace the event. You might say something such as, "I'm checking the refrigerator for milk, and finishing my list. Are you going to help me find things in the store? Do you think we will find many red things? We'll be going as soon as I find my keys and my coat."

These transitions will be easier if your daily cycles are fairly predictable. In time your child will be able to anticipate, and even remind you that it's time for a new activity.

Lastly, put a name on the days when the routine is different and talk about them. For instance, remind your daughter in the morning that this is a "visit grandma day" or perhaps it's "go to church day." In any case, those days should have predictable routines of their own, even if they are different from other, more normal days.

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Plan ahead to avoid the “gimmies” in grocery aisles

By Mark Sullivan, Executive Director, Michigan 4C Association

Q: It is so embarrassing. You take your three-year old grocery shopping and she just wants to get out of the cart and pull items off the shelves. She’s even thrown a temper tantrum right there in the checkout line. What can you do?

A: Kids are people, too! Grocery store planners spend a lot of energy trying to get you to impulsively grab items from the shelves, so it’s not very surprising that your child gets their message, even if you don’t. In fact, think about the ways you avoid impulse buying, and apply those rules:

- Plan ahead – reduce the number of trips to the store, and leave her in the care of others for some of those trips.
- Shop from a list – it saves time and keeps trips within a child’s attention span.
- Shop when you and she are well-fed and rested. Tired and hungry is no way to grocery shop.

Once you are at the store, allow the child to participate:

- Stop for a moment and focus your attention completely on her as she helps pick out a box of cereal or something else safely. Children want to explore their environments and if you can, let them out of the cart as you watch. Remember, a two-minute pause in the aisles may seem long, but a tantrum at the checkout lane lasts an eternity.
- Make trips fun by playing “I Spy,” or asking questions that require thinking, but don’t seem like a quiz. For example, “Help me find the things that are heavy, so we can put them in the bottom of the bag.”
- If you are going to purchase an item for your child, carefully limit the choices before she makes a decision. Here’s the trap to avoid:

Dad, looking for a break, says, “OK, you can pick one out yourself.”

Child lunges for the most expensive, gooeyist, sugar-laden or sharpest object in sight, saying, “I want THAT one.”

Dad, now grabbing the child’s forearm, “No, you can’t have THAT one.”

Child demonstrates mastery of valuable debate skills with comeback, “BUT YOU SAID I COULD CHOOSE!”

If you do find yourself in a situation like this, take a deep breath. You are still a good parent, you just happen to have an upset child. As long as the child poses no real danger to herself or anything else your best bet might be to acknowledge her feelings, “I’m sorry. I know you wanted that one, and I should have been more clear...”

When you get home, consider reading her a good book – such as *The Berenstain Bears Get The Gimmies* by Stan and Jan Berenstain.

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Holiday Gifts

By Mark Sullivan, Executive Director, Michigan 4C Association

Q: The holidays are coming up and my four-year old is the first grandchild in the family, so he's going to get a lot of attention. What gifts would you suggest that have some educational value?

A: First of all, weed out 99% of the toys that refer to “brain development” in their advertising. It’s just hype. Researchers may be convinced that the first five years are important for brain development, but they don’t know enough yet to tell you which pre-school toy will get your kid into Harvard. Just doing lots of things and talking about them with your little one is going to be more effective than any holiday toy.

Next, downplay anything that requires batteries, “some assembly,” complicated instructions, or holds some form of a computer chip. No doubt someone will falter on this front, and that’s not a disaster – it’s just that there are plenty of other choices around that are great fun, good for learning, and don’t require downloading anything.

Look for things that encourage lots of different uses or imaginative play. For instance, a box of appropriately-sized blocks beats a toy truck in that regard, but a few toy vehicles that can go from the kid’s room to the kitchen floor to the waiting room at the doctor’s office certainly beats a looping roller coaster car that goes on a track that has a dozen pieces and takes 20 minutes to set up in only a single configuration. You see where we’re coming from on this one?

Of course, when it comes to portability, nothing beats a book. Especially one that you will read to him over and over again, sitting next to him and discussing it with him.

Books are also generally pretty safe objects, and safety should always be a concern. For instance, stick with the recommended age minimums on toy labels, and no bike should ever arrive without a helmet.

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Reading is a “three-way” street

By Mark Sullivan, Executive Director, Michigan 4C Association

Q: I want my child to be a good reader, so I am going to start reading to him, but when? He’s less than a year old, and he’d just as soon chew on the book as look at it.

A: It’s true the expression “eat your words” has an entirely different meaning when it applies to babies and books. There is a reason why board or cloth books have non-toxic inks!

Those books often don’t even have words, just pictures. They are built to be explored by your child, and used by a parent to establish a caring interaction that can grow through the years.

Start with an infant by holding him in your lap with the book in front of both of you. The closeness and sharing are critical for emotional as well as intellectual growth of your child. If you can adjust him to one side so you can occasionally look at each other, or the book, even better. Parent to child “face time” is very important.

Using a sturdy picture book, talk about each page or picture. Talk about such things as, “What is this? What is it doing? What color is it? How does it feel?” A sentence or two is fine. You will be doing this over and over again with a few favorite books, so there’s no need to overdo it each time.

Let your child handle the book as he is able to. A child is not “bad” because he tries to explore the book with his mouth. That’s natural for an infant. Think of it as “getting a taste for books.” Gently remove it and move on when that happens. Reading this way creates a pattern of associations between a comfortable and secure experience with a caring adult and representations in print and language.

Reading with a slightly older child gives you a chance to build “phonemic awareness.” Hearing comes before talking, so even before a toddler has started making words (that you can understand) the child is hearing all that you say and creates associations between sounds and meanings. Rhymes or repeating letter sounds give the child chances to hear word differences, see how you make the sounds and enjoy the attention.

Stop from time to time while reading to an older toddler and start asking “what do you think” questions. They are better than “name this” questions because they encourage self-expression and practice in using language. The answers may surprise and amuse you. At this stage, good expression is more important than “right” answers to questions such as, “what color is it?”

When reading to a pre-schooler you can start making closer associations between words on the page and spoken language. Reading the same books over and over again may wear you out, but repeating phrases he’s memorized as he looks at the page is good practice for your child. Continue your conversation by encouraging him to make up new parts of the story to go along with what he hears and sees. This is what we mean when we say reading is a “three-way” street. It’s a place where three people meet to exchange ideas – the author, you and your child.

Reach your local Michigan 4C agency with your questions about young children by calling 1-866-4CHILDCARE during business hours from your home phone. Look for more child care tips at www.mi4c.org. Email your ZERO TO FIVE questions to ZeroToFive@mi4c.org.

ZERO TO FIVE IN 60 SECONDS – QUICK TIPS FOR PARENTS OF YOUNG CHILDREN

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“Here she comes!”

By Mark Sullivan, Executive Director, Michigan 4C Association

Q: My six-month old baby has started inching her way around the floor, so I know that she'll be crawling around the room soon. How should I be prepared?

A: The joke goes that no matter where you set a child down, she will always head for the sharpest object in the room. And most of the time it will be something you don't even see.

The way to prepare for this situation is to look at the world through your child's eyes. Sit on the floor with her. Better still, lie on your stomach. Even if she's not about to crawl around, it's still a good idea to get down to her level, because you can have a much richer interaction with her than watching her from above. Jiggle her toys, see what she's interested in and talk to her in gentle voice. Let her explore your hands and face. It's more fun than playing with a puppy!

The world is a very different place at this altitude, isn't it? Telephone cords, electrical outlets, power strips, spilled Cheerios, dropped coins, lost pencils (well sharpened) and dust bunnies all loom large from this perspective. It's no wonder kids explore these things. Crawl around and identify the vulnerable places – the unprotected outlets, the houseplants, the chairs with casters that might pinch or roll over a finger and the other “stuff” – aptly named because it is stuffed under couches or beds – that could injure or poison.

There are times and places where appropriate child fences, playpens and other restraints are necessary, but you and your child will have better experiences if you can crawl-proof places in your house where you can be with her.

You might as well anticipate the next stage of development, too. Almost as soon as they can actively crawl around a room, most children will start trying to pull themselves up to stand. And what goes up can pull something down. So turn your “radar” to items such as lamp cords and tablecloths. Remember, when she reaches for your jacket that you dropped on the countertop, your five-pound purse and \$200 cell phone will be sitting on top of it.

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Look for infant child care before the baby is born

By Mark Sullivan, Executive Director, Michigan 4C Association

Q: I just found out I am pregnant. This is my first child, and I will need child care for the baby. What are the different child care options available to me? When should I start looking at child care facilities, and what should I look for?

A: If you lived in Manhattan, it might already be too late! The stories there about finding “the right place” for your child are really frightening. Even in Michigan there are counties with shortages of available places—especially for infants—so you should begin your research two or three months before you will need care.

Start by calling 1-866-4CHILDCARE from your home phone. That statewide, toll-free number will connect you to a referral specialist who keeps track of all licensed or registered child care in your area. He or she can give you a list of centers and homes that you can contact, and a brochure describing what you should look for and questions you can ask.

You can find regulated care for your child in a center with many other children, in a private home with fewer children, or in your own home. There are advantages and disadvantages to each, so consider carefully.

Research shows that infants thrive if they are held, talked to, and gently helped to explore their environment by caregivers who form stable relationships with the child. The best way to check that out is to request a visit long enough to observe what the caregiver does in the center or home. In any case, there should be no more than four infants between birth and age three in the care of one adult.

The four steps described in more detail in the brochure and on the Web at <http://www.mi4c.org/programs/downloads/4stepscc.pdf> include:

- Interview possible caregivers – Ask about everything, but don’t forget education and training, because the skill of the caregiver is often an indicator of quality care. A state license or registration is a minimum.
- Check references – Ask other parents how well the caregiver does with their child, and how well the caregiver communicates with them.
- Choose quality – Pick a caregiver who has the skills and interest in meeting the needs of your child and family and your budget.
- Stay involved – Ask for and expect regular conversations about your child with the caregiver.

Save the phone number, 1-866-4CHILDCARE because the Michigan 4C agency you’ve reached has other great resources for parents and child care providers. Don’t hesitate to call and ask about them. The agency trains child care providers, educates parents about raising children, helps find financial resources for child care when families are in great need, and just happens to write this column.

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It's not “making a mess,” it's “experimenting” with paint

By Mark Sullivan, Executive Director, Michigan 4C Association

Q: Why do young children come home from child care with paint, mud, or food all over their clothes? Why can't they just stay clean?

A: Children who sit and watch television stay clean. Children who are actively learning by experimenting with mud, paint and bananas tend to get dirty.

This is a good thing. Those “experiments” are helping children develop muscles and muscle control. Stimulation from those activities creates connections in the brain that can last a lifetime. So dirty clothes are often indicators of progress, not symptoms of a problem.

There are also ways to limit the chore of clothing cleanups. Many child care providers ask parents to supply an oversized “paint shirt” for messy activities. Plastic aprons are good when the clothes could get wet. Many kids look forward to putting them on because they know it's a sign of fun to come. And it's not a bad idea to keep a spare set of clothes with the caregiver just in case “stuff happens.”

On the other hand, cleaning up our messes, brushing off our clothes, and washing our hands and faces are also good learning activities, and they have the added benefit of helping to prevent the spread of infection. Good child care should have both kinds of activities.

So when you check in for a visit or pick up your child, look around to see if your child and his classmates stay dirty after messy activities or their clothes seem to have more than expected wear and tear. If there is a consistent pattern, that might be a sign of careless care.

Usually, though, you are simply experiencing the Great Wash Cycle of Life: kids get dirty, kids clean up. All is good.

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My child plays at child care while I work all day – is that right?

By Mark Sullivan, Executive Director, Michigan 4C Association

Q: It seems my child spends most of her time in child care at play -- while I work all day. How can I tell if my child is really being prepared for school?

A: Play is serious business for young children. They work as hard at it as you work on your job – and it pays well, too, if you measure the pay in physical, cognitive, emotional, and social growth. Children delight in make-believe or just exploring materials such as blocks, clay or finger paint. Those activities help them practice making choices, develop their fine and gross motor skills, and interact socially with their peers. There is also a great opportunity to nurture creativity during play.

In fact, the most important preparation for Kindergarten is developing a few basic life skills, curiosity, and some abilities to interact well with others, including adults and children. Play helps all those things.

Child care providers can add significantly to the value of play, so it's worthwhile to ask –

- Is play age-appropriate? For instance, competitive games are usually best left for school-age children.
- Is there time set aside for active and physical play and other, “dramatic” or creative play?
- Does the equipment encourage children to use their imagination – not limiting their play to a single purpose or skill?
- Do children have a chance to express themselves while playing and make choices?
- Does the provider guide with a “light touch” to extend play, but not over-direct it or try to make it too obviously “instructive?”
- Does the provider converse with the children to draw out ideas? (Telling children what to do or asking “quiz questions” such as, “What color is that?” doesn’t count.) Look instead for speculating with an open-ended question such as, “Now that Mommy has her baby all dressed, where do you think they might go, and what will they do there?”

When all those things are happening, play really works!

Reach your local Michigan 4C agency with your questions about young children by calling 1-866-4CHILDCARE during business hours from your home phone. Look for more child care tips at www.MI4C.org. Email your ZERO TO FIVE questions to Zerotofive@mi4c.org.



Expulsion

By Mark Sullivan, Executive Director, Michigan 4C Association

Q: I was shocked when the director of the child care center where my 3-year old son gets care says his behavior is so aggressive and disruptive that she may not be able to keep him there. Could this be true? And if so, what can I do?

A: Some aggressive behavior in children is just part of growing up and your child care provider sees that every day. However, your child care provider may be seeing something out of the ordinary, and it is time to take steps.

Start with a parent-provider conference. Keep the lines of communication open. Try to identify the specific situations and behaviors that are concerning to the provider. This is an emotional subject, but a calm discussion often identifies the triggers to aggression and can lead to solutions. Consider observing your child from the sidelines while he is interacting with adults and other children at child care. Then compare your observations and disciplining styles with the providers. Keep this in mind – how you manage behavior at home should be compatible with what he experiences with your provider. Ask yourself the following questions: Is my child acting out because he is not getting enough attention from his caregivers or other children? Is my child having a hard time adjusting to his environment or new activities? Does the child care setting enforce consistent, age-appropriate classroom rules?

Some things to consider at home:

- Health or developmental reasons? Demanding schedules and increased stress at home? How do you discipline? Some children react to punitive discipline by imitating it – they interpret grabbing, hitting, shouting as “how adults get their way.”
- Do you accept aggressive behaviors in your home or allow violent games or images on TV? Or do you model solving problems through discussion and cooperation?

If you and your child care provider cannot come to a resolution and she is about to turn your child away to protect other children, ask for outside help before she does. In many Michigan counties, the 4C agency offers confidential help to prevent child care expulsions. This might require little more than an observation by an outside expert and a discussion with parents and a provider. Or it could turn into some extra training for both parties.

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Flu Prevention

By Mark Sullivan, Executive Director, Michigan 4C Association

Q: I really worry about the flu and every other kind of contagious disease that might appear at the child care center. What can I do?

A: Teach your child to wash her hands, set a good example for it yourself at home, take time at home to let her learn to do it well and see that your child care provider does the same. Hand washing is not quite a miracle activity, but it may be the single easiest preventive measure you have available to you.

Find a way to spend some time observing your child care provider's routines. Very young children need help washing their hands, but by age three, many can do the job themselves. And once they've learned they can do it and that it's important, they are very good about teaching others and reminding everyone to follow their lead and wash regularly. It's great positive peer pressure, actually.

Other good practices to look for:

- Wiping down counters and food preparation areas with bleach solution
- Wiping down toys with a milder bleach solution
- No sharing of food. Food preparation is a very good activity for children, as long as all surfaces are properly cleaned and the food handling tasks are kept to just the minimum of what's required to learn something.
- Careful handling of diaper changes and caregiver hand washing immediately afterwards
- Putting on clean clothes after soiling or wetting incidents

Ask your child care provider when she notifies parents about a contagious disease. You ought to get a note or a call about flu or any other serious infectious disease that shows up at a child care center or classroom, or even a milder infection if it begins to affect a significant proportion of the other children. If you are concerned, press the issue to give yourself an opportunity to keep your child home to reduce exposure. That being said, remember that chicken pox, measles and a few other childhood illnesses are actually better caught when your child is young, because the symptoms and risks become worse with age.

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Sick child planning

By Mark Sullivan, Executive Director, Michigan 4C Association

Q: What do I do when my kid is sick and they won't accept him at child care? I can't afford to miss too many work days.

A: There is no getting around the fact that kids get sick. Prepare for those times in advance; and begin by learning your child care provider's policies for sending children home. You don't want to drop off a child, only to be called back as soon as you get to work. If your child is running a fever, for instance, it's not likely he feels like or should be around other children in a normal care surrounding.

The Oakland County Health Department has created a very thorough list of diseases and how long children should be excluded from school or child care for each one. The list is useful after you have seen a doctor and have a confirmed diagnosis. Find it by searching for "communicable disease reference chart" at www.co.oakland.mi.us.

Households with two parents sometimes can split child sick days, so neither has to absorb them all. Other people you call on should be trusted friends or relatives, because it's really best if they can come to your house. Transporting a sick child isn't going to be pleasant, and may not be healthy for anyone involved. And there is no place like your own bed or a comfy couch when you are feeling miserable.

In fact, sometimes the lure of those places raises the question, "Is the child really sick?" If he is up and around and has no fever, even if he complains of stomach ache or another vague malady, it could be a simple case of "stay-home-itis," or as professionals would call it, separation anxiety. Then it's time to turn your attention to transition remedies, not traditional medicine. He may have a concern about something going on at the center or at home that he may not be able to express. Stop the rush to get out the door in the morning for a hug and some reassurance that you love him and he is going to a place where people care about, and like him. Although the pause may put you a few minutes late for work – it might be better than missing all day.

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